

Feral Cats: What to do?



CAT DEFINITIONS



- **Feral** – not socialized, afraid of people
- **Stray** – not owned, friendly towards people
- **Community** – encompasses both feral and stray. Defined as “feral, stray and lost cats who live outside and don’t belong to anybody.”

PERSPECTIVE



- Emphasis on spaying and neutering
- Do what works best and what is supported by research or experience
- Help AC use resources most effectively

A FEW BASICS



- Cats have been around humans for more than 10,000 years. They're not going away.
- It wasn't until the late 1940s—and the invention of cat litter—that cats began living indoors.
- In urban neighborhoods, community cats often live in loose groups called colonies. Surveys suggest that between 10 and 20% of households feed the cats, who also commonly eat from dumpsters.
- Community cats produce more than 80% of kittens born each year. This is the group that must be targeted to reduce overpopulation.

WHY THERE'S A PROBLEM

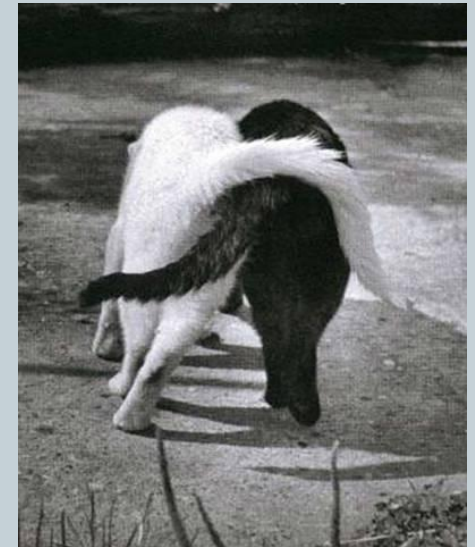


- Irresponsible pet owners abandon cats and/or don't get them spayed or neutered.
- Lack of public understanding about the problem.
- Well meaning people FEED community cats but don't FIX them.

OPTIONS



- Do nothing
- Trap and Euthanize (T&E)
- Trap Neuter Return (TNR)
- Trap Neuter & Provide Sanctuary (TNPS)



DO NOTHING



PROS

- Cheap and easy.
- Number of cats will stay about the same *provided the food resources don't increase.*

CONS

- Breeding continues.
- Nuisance behaviors (spraying, yowling, fighting, and wandering) continue.
- Continuing threat to public health.

TRAP AND EUTHANIZE



PROS

- In theory, if a minimum of 50% of the cats are removed **annually**, a population reduction can result.
- Cats can successfully be eradicated from an area **if** the food source is also successfully removed. This is almost never the case because there are usually multiple food sources.

TRAP AND EUTHANIZE



CONS

- **Vacuum effect.** Intact survivors breed more prolifically while new cats move into the now-available territory. The vacuum effect is recognized worldwide, across all types of animal species. Put another way, a cat population will increase until a carrying capacity is reached. Temporarily lowering the population offers no long-term reduction since the population will simply increase back to carrying capacity.

TRAP AND EUTHANIZE



CONS

- Cost is extremely high because cats have to be trapped and removed on a regular basis.
- It's really hard to do! Example: Marion Island located in the Southern Indian Ocean. 2,200 cats took 19 years to eradicate. Methods used: trapping, introduction of feline distemper, hunting by dogs, poisoning. Cruelty aside, no cost was ever reported for this effort.

TRAP NEUTER RETURN



- How it works—instead of cat being trapped and taken to the pound, it is trapped, sterilized, vaccinated, eartipped, and returned to its territory.



TRAP NEUTER RETURN



Model #1: Traditional TNR

- Goal is to trap and fix as many cats as possible in a geographic area—for example, the Grant Beach neighborhood.
- 75% of cats must be trapped and sterilized to cause a population decline.
- Residents monitor the area for new cats and fix those as well.
- Population stabilizes and decreases over time.

TRAP NEUTER RETURN



Model #2: *Feral Freedom*

- A recent innovation in TNR. Targets cats entering the system anyway. Cats eligible for FF: three months or older, not sick or injured, not declawed.
- Rather than taking cat to shelter, AC officer takes trapped cat for spay/neuter, eartipping, and vaccinations, then returns cat to territory the following day.
- Causes an immediate decline in intake and euthanasia.
- Returns cats to neighborhoods that are healthier, vaccinated, *will not reproduce*, and will have far fewer nuisance behaviors.
- The spirit of the program is to encourage residents to take “community ownership of community cats.”

TRAP NEUTER RETURN



PROS

- Controls population and reduces euthanasia.
- Reduces number of complaints to Animal Control; costs much less than T&E if low-cost spay/neuter is available.
- Has been successful in a number of communities, including San Diego; Alachua County, Florida; Cape May, New Jersey; and San Francisco.

TRAP NEUTER RETURN



CONS

- When word gets out, pet owners will begin dumping cats in TNR neighborhoods, an unintended consequence that has hampered otherwise successful TNR efforts.
- Residents in neighborhoods where TNR is most needed may not be vigilant about getting new cats fixed.
- These drawbacks apply to traditional TNR, not *Feral Freedom*.

TRAP NEUTER & PROVIDE SANCTUARY



PROS

- A humane outcome for the cats, who will be cared for in a safe environment.

CONS

- Exceedingly expensive and unrealistic. An estimated 2,000-3,000 feral cats live in zip code 65802 alone. In theory, at least half of the cats would need to be sent to a sanctuary annually just to keep the population from increasing.
- Quote from an AVMA study: “[C]are-for-life in sanctuaries is recognized as the most expensive and least efficient method of population management. Most sanctuary programs that permanently house a large number of feral cats also have an active TNR program because the sanctuaries are filled to capacity.”

BUT WHAT ABOUT THE BIRDS?



- The bird issue is a moot point because the choice isn't between cats and no cats. The choice is between sterilized and unsterilized cats.
- Studies showing depletion of birds by feral cats are usually done by advocacy groups with an agenda and are often filled with false or misleading information. Example: *Wildlife Society*. This link is among the top returned from a google search and is riddled with errors: http://joomla.wildlife.org/documents/cats_tnr.pdf
- The most prolific hunters are nursing females and young cats. Those two facts suggest that TNR may actually lessen hunting. The hunting habits of cats before and after TNR need to be studied. Why hasn't a wildlife organization sponsored such a study?

THE BOTTOM LINE



- The cats aren't going away.
- TNPS is not a viable option.
- T&E is costly, inefficient, and results in needless death.
- TNR is the best option because it's cost effective and it stops breeding, greatly reduces nuisance behaviors, and improves the health of the cats.



THE RESEARCH



- Looked for studies that used modeling so comparisons could be made of cost and effort over time. Three studies reached the same conclusion: Annual T&E of 50%+ of the population or TNR of 75%+ will reduce population. Links listed on next slide.
- The 50% number for T&E is theoretical, while the 75% number for TNR has been proven in a number of studies.
- The cost difference between the two methods is **significant**.
- Two of the three studies are not pro-TNR.

RESEARCH LINKS



Evaluation of euthanasia and trap-neuter-return (TNR) programs in managing free-roaming cat populations. **Wildlife Research.**

http://irnr.tamu.edu/media/256834/evaluation_of_euthanasia_and_trap_neuter_return_tnr_programs_in_managing_free-roaming_cat_populations.pdf

Use of matrix population models to estimate the efficacy of euthanasia versus trap-neuter-return for management of free-roaming cats. **Journal of the American Veterinary Medical Association (JAVMA).**

http://www.avma.org/avmacollections/feral_cats/javma_225_12_1871.pdf

Evaluation of a trap-neuter-return management program for feral cat colonies: Population dynamics, home ranges, and potentially zoonotic diseases.

Dissertation submitted to North Carolina State University. Several portions of the dissertation published in JAVMA.

http://www.carnivoreconservation.org/files/thesis/nutter_2005_phd.pdf

T&E VS. TNR: THE COST



- Animal Control provided a figure of **\$75** as the current average cost to pick up, house, feed, and euthanize a cat.
- The cost to TNR is estimated at **\$37** (using the *Feral Freedom* program for 950 cats annually). This includes \$25 for spaying or neutering at SAAFhouse and \$12 for mileage and an AC officer's time to pick up and return cat.
- No matter how you slice it, TNR is a lot cheaper.

T&E VS. TNR: THE COST



T&E model (24.4% population decrease after 25 years, 50%+ T&E)	
Treatment effort: # cats treated to cause a 1% decline in population*	190
Cost per cat	\$75
TOTAL COST	\$14,250
TNR model (21.1% population decrease after 25 years, 75% TNR)	
Treatment effort: # cats treated to cause a 1% decline in population*	19
Cost per cat	\$37
TOTAL COST	\$703

*Treatment effort numbers were taken from model in *Wildlife Research* article mentioned on earlier slide.

RECOMMENDATIONS



- **First choice:** Implement *Feral Freedom* through Animal Control.
 - ❖ Will dramatically and immediately reduce euthanasia, as well as the number of incoming cats, reducing the required capacity of a new facility.
 - ❖ Costs much less than what is currently being spent per cat.
 - ❖ Eliminates risk of cat abandonment found in traditional TNR.
 - ❖ Declawed, sick/injured, and cats younger than 3 months will not be eligible for the program. Returned cats will be healthy, vaccinated, unable to produce kittens, and will have far fewer nuisance behaviors.
 - ❖ Friendly cats will be transferred to rescues whenever possible.
 - ❖ Grant money is available to get the program up and running.

RECOMMENDATIONS



- **Second choice:** Do nothing. Use the cost savings to subsidize spay/neuter of cats instead. T&E is so inefficient that doing nothing seems a better option. Assuming the food resources stay the same, the colonies should remain fairly stable.
- In any event, a public education campaign is needed to inform residents of the connection between feeding and spay/neuter (*“don’t feed ‘em if you can’t fix ‘em”*).